

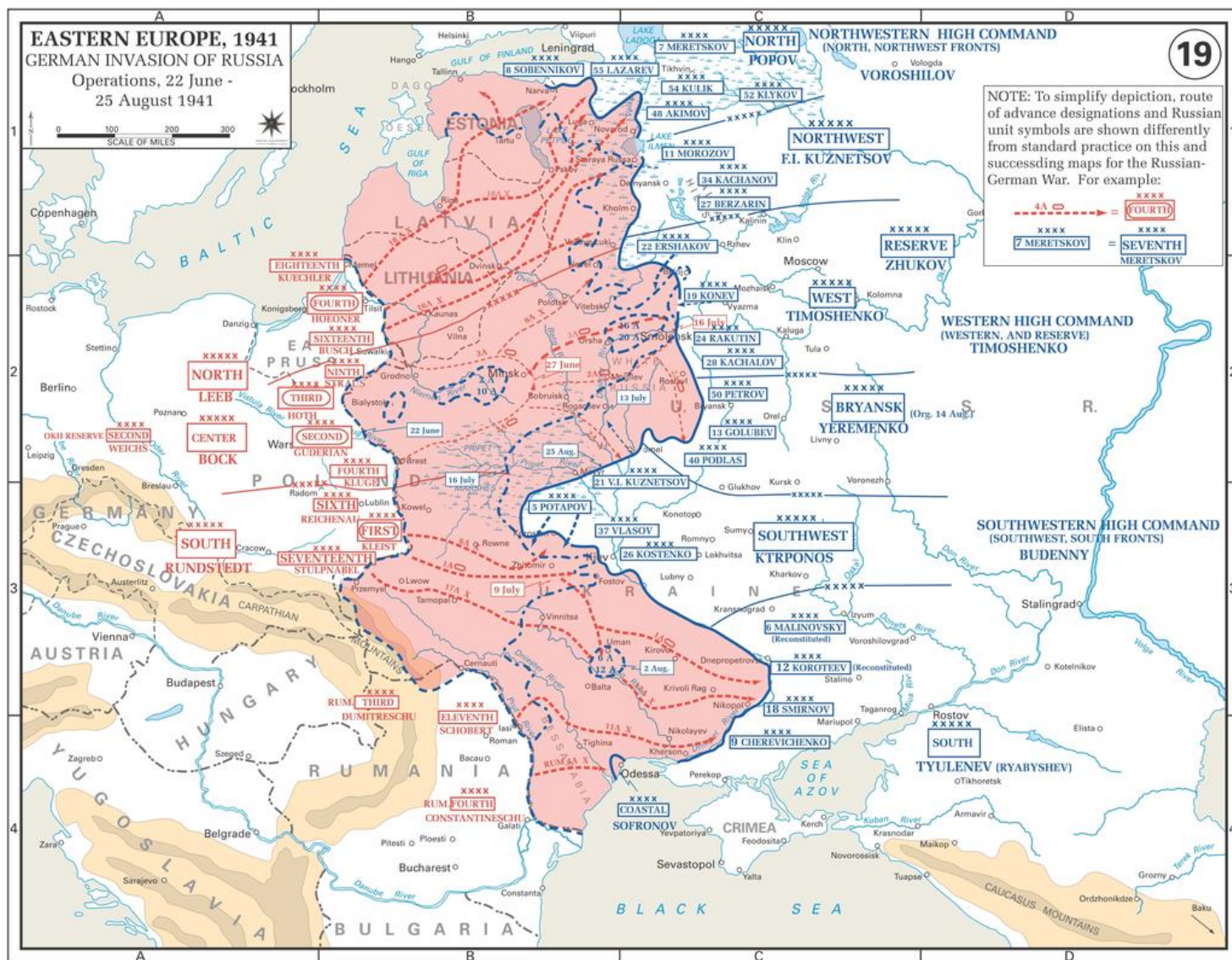


Operation Barbarossa

Presented by the Hampton Roads Naval Museum

Operation Barbarossa Begins

Operation Barbarossa, the German invasion of the Soviet Union (Russia), began on June 22, 1941. Despite having a non-aggression pact with Stalin, Adolf Hitler had strong anti-Russian feelings. Hitler's distrust of the Soviets grew when Russian forces were in close proximity to the oil fields in Romania during the Soviet occupation of northern Bukovina (modern-day Romania). Hitler's suspicions of Joseph Stalin continued to build, and Hitler felt compelled to act.





Although the original plan to invade Russia was scheduled for the middle of May, this was postponed by Germany's invasion of Greece and Yugoslavia. Hitler and his top generals were convinced that the Russians could be defeated in a quick and decisive blow. German strategists estimated that in two or three months, the European region of Russia would be in German possession.

The Two Combatants

The assembled force for what was known as Operation Barbarossa consisted of 150 divisions, roughly 3 million soldiers. This included 19 Panzer divisions totaling 3,000 tanks; 7,000 artillery pieces; and 2,500 aircraft. It was the largest invasion force assembled in history.

In comparison, the Soviets had between 2.6 and 2.9 million men; 11,000 tanks; and between 7,000 and 9,000 aircraft, although their aircraft would be outclassed by the more advanced German Luftwaffe.





This operation resulted in the creation of the Eastern Front, and led to some of the largest battles of World War II. With the coming of winter, the hardened Soviet soldiers held out during the Battle of Moscow, and started pushing the German forces back.

The Cost of the Eastern Front

Overall, Germany's Operation Barbarossa failed and Hitler's forces suffered over 1 million casualties, including 186,452 killed and 655,179 wounded. In addition, the Germans lost 2,872 aircraft, 2,735 tanks, and 104 assault guns. The initial loss took away Hitler's momentum and slowed the German conquest of Eastern Europe.

